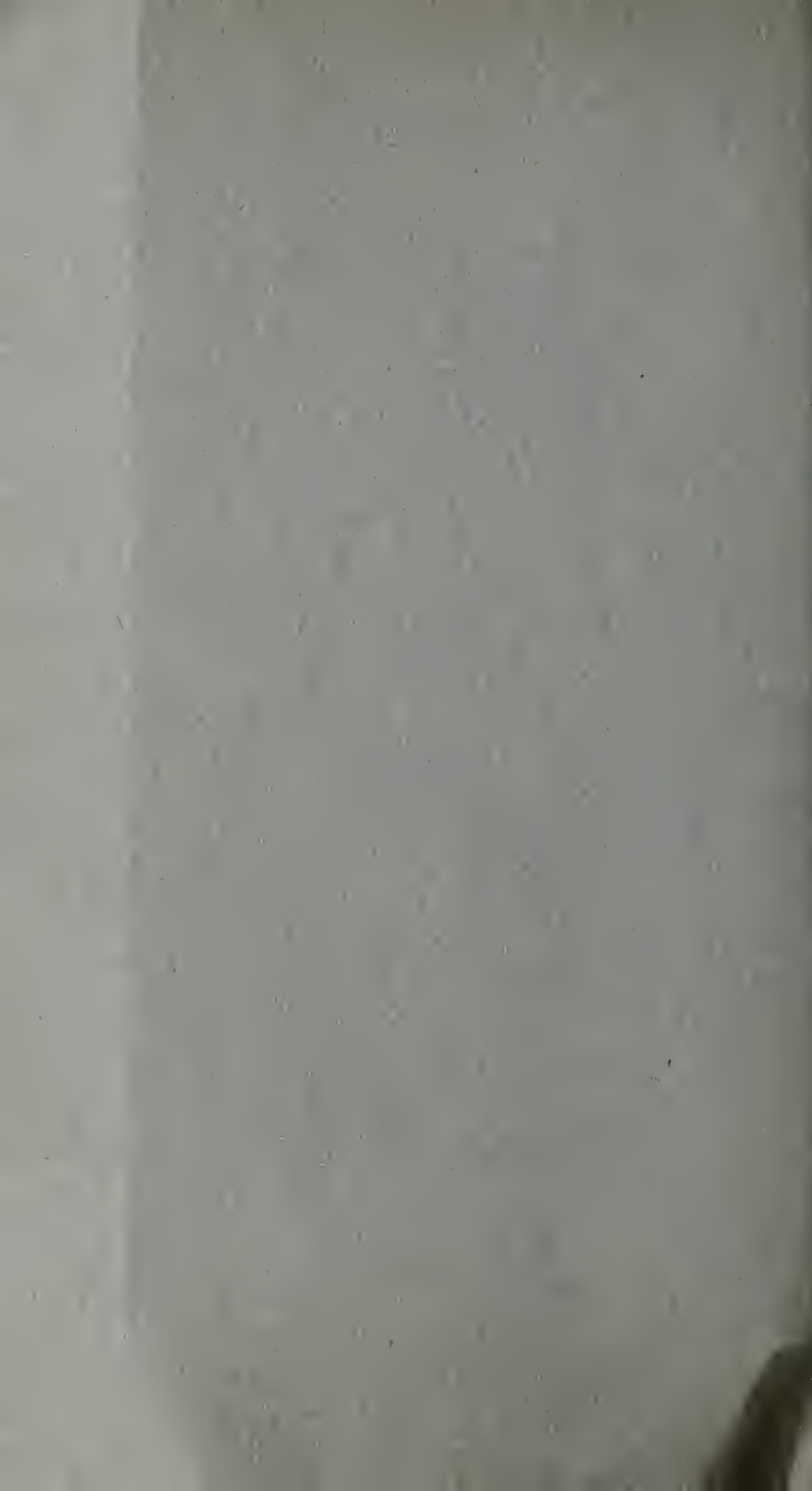


# FRIGHTFULNESS IN RETREAT

HODDER & STOUGHTON  
LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

MCMXVII

PRICE THREEPENCE.



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FRIGHTFULNESS IN RETREAT.





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GERMAN DOCUMENT DATED 9TH MARCH, 1917, WHICH GIVES INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PROCEDURE PRELIMINARY TO THE GERMAN WITHDRAWAL ON THE BRITISH FRONT.

#### TRANSLATION.

1. Pioneer P. and 1 infantryman will throw dung into the wells.
2. Pioneer M. and 3 infantrymen will cut down the trees.
3. Pioneer B. and 2 infantrymen will carry out special tasks.
1. Pioneer H. and 2 infantrymen will stack wood in houses.

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# CONTENTS.

	PAGE
(i.) Frightfulness in Retreat . . . . .	5
(ii.) Proceedings of the French Senate, March 31st, 1917. (Translated from the <i>Journal Officiel de la République Française</i> ) . . . . .	27
(iii.) Official Report of the French Commission Appointed to Inves- tigate Acts Committed by the Enemy in Violation of the Law of Nations . . . . .	63



## I.—Frightfulness in Retreat.

“**I**N the course of these last months,” writes the military correspondent of the German *Lokalanzeiger* on March 18, 1917, “great stretches of French territory have been turned by us into a dead country. It varies in width from 10 to 12 or 15 kilometres ( $6\frac{1}{4}$  to  $7\frac{1}{2}$  or 8 miles), and extends along the whole of our new position, presenting a terrible barrier of desolation to any enemy hardy enough to advance against our new lines. No village or farm was left standing on this glaxis, no road was left passable, no railway-track or embankment was left in being. Where once were woods there are gaunt rows of stumps; the wells have been blown up, wires, cables, and pipelines destroyed. In front of our new positions runs, like a gigantic ribbon, an empire of death.”

The writer claims to be an eye-witness of what he describes; he made a tour of the devastated zone a fortnight before the retirement began, having been “taken into confidence,” as he informs his readers, “by the High German Command.” It was they, no doubt, who inspired him to dwell so gloatingly upon the “empire of death” which they had made; it was the only consolation they had to offer the German people for a strategic movement alien to the tradition of the Prussian military power and damaging to its prestige. It is a poor consolation

at best. From the military point of view it is being nullified already by the swift labour of thousands of French and English hands—remaking roads, relaying lines, bridging streams and mine-craters, and bringing up the men and guns of the Allies at a pace which has thrown out the German plan of retreat and baulked its authors of that “unconditional freedom of movement and initiative” which their mouthpiece boasts that they have gained. “Something greater was at stake,” writes the correspondent of the *Lokalanzeiger*, “than consideration for certain districts of a country which has refused us peace after this gigantic, and for us victorious, struggle.” This military object at stake may well be lost to Germany, but she clings all the closer to the consolation of revenge. She could not have peace with victory, for she could not cope with the French and British armies in the field. But the civil population of the occupied territories was in her power, and once more she has vented her spite upon them—as barbarously as when her first plans miscarried in August and September, 1914.

The description in the *Lokalanzeiger* is surpassed by the realities which the French and British troops have verified in their advance.

“Whole towns and villages have been pillaged, burnt and destroyed,” states the French Government in its Protest to Neutral Powers; “private houses have been stripped of all their furniture, which the enemy has carried off; fruit trees have

been torn up or rendered useless for all future production ; springs and wells have been poisoned. The comparatively few inhabitants who were not deported to the rear were left with the smallest possible ration of food, while the enemy took possession of the stocks provided by the Neutral Relief Committee and intended for the civil population."

There are facts in this statement upon which the German press did not care to dwell, and the point of the indictment is this :—

" It is a question not of acts aimed at hampering the operations of the Allied armies, but of acts of devastation which have no connection with that object, and the aim of which is to ruin for many years to come one of the most fertile regions of France."

This charge is borne out in detail by evidence from place after place which has been entered by the Allies.

At *Barleux*,\* in the bend of the Somme, the Royal Army Medical Corps found that the water supply had been not blown up as the *Lokalanzeiger* would imply, but poisoned with arsenic ; and in a captured German order, dated March 14, 1917, the second squadron of the Sixth German Cuirassiers (Thirty-eighth Division) was directed, for the same purpose, to heap up at the wells it abandoned " a sufficient quantity of manure." †

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\* *Times*, March 19. † *Le Temps*, March 27.

*Peronne* \* was found looted. The strong-rooms of the local branch of the *Banque de France* had been broken open and their contents carried off. Most of the houses had had their fronts blown in, the rest had been burnt—they were still smouldering when our troops marched through. The church was gutted, the Mairie partially destroyed.

*Vraignes*, † on the road to St. Quentin, had been selected as a concentration place for those civilians whom the Germans preferred to leave behind—the “useless mouths,” as the *Lokalanzeiger* calls them, which were to be left for the Allies to feed. One thousand and fifty people, rounded up here, were ordered by the Germans to hand over all the money in their possession. £520 was extracted by this command, but, not content, the Germans herded the people into the square and subjected them to a search. Some men were even stripped naked, but no more money was found. The Germans had effectively possessed themselves of their all.

At *Nesle* ‡ the Germans prepared for their retreat as early as February 17 by deporting 423 women and girls. The correspondent of the *Lokalanzeiger* mentions that “all able-bodied men and youths were deported into the interior”

\* *Times*, March 20; French Protest.

† French Protest.

‡ *Times*, March 23, 26; Associated Press cable, March 22.

from the whole evacuated territory, and that "no man capable of bearing arms was left to increase the strength of the enemy"; but he is silent about the women. Yet the Germans took all able-bodied females above fifteen years of age, as well as all able-bodied males above sixteen, and decreed at Nesle that all women must go who were capable of working in German factories and farms and had no children dependent on them. On the other hand, they not only left the aged and infirm in the abandoned zone, but collected others from St. Quentin and places further behind and marooned them there, for the Allied armies to salvage if they could. The correspondent of the American United Press\* met a woman with a six-months-old baby in her arms; she had four other children dependent on her, as well as her grandmother, transported from St. Quentin according to this German device. Three months before the baby was born her husband had been deported into the interior—to Belgium or Germany—and she had had no news of his fate. Her eldest son, a child of 12, was paid sixpence a day by the Germans for the work they compelled him to do.

The destruction of houses in Nesle was very complete. "In the doctor's house," reports a special correspondent of the *Times*,† "axes had been driven through the mahogany panels of the

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\* Cable of March 22.

† *Times*, March 23.

beds, the clocks and mirrors smashed, and the wainscotting torn out. All portable articles were taken away. The doctor was fortunate in not having his house walls blown out, like many of his townsfolk."

The German soldiers did not misunderstand the nature of their work.

"Between St. Quentin and Brissay-Choigny," wrote a soldier of the Thirty-ninth Infantry Regiment in his diary,\* "We are blowing up or burning - all the villages. Scandalous. It is called constructing our own positions. All non-commissioned officers are forced to work. The inhabitants are forced to leave. They are allowed seventy kilogrammes of luggage. Germany for ever! On March 21st, company marches to la Fère and goes into billets there. The rooms are empty; we collect the beds and mattresses. Excellent billets, but how long are we going to be so well off? The destruction we are doing runs into millions. It is an eternal disgrace for Germany."

And here is the letter of another German who did the same work further south:—

"To give you a picture of our situation, I will go back in my mind a few days to Trescault. It is 8 p.m. The company has just returned from trench-digging. A beautiful scene is presented

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\* The diary has been captured, and the extract here quoted was originally published in the Belgian journal *Les Nouvelles*, of Maestricht (Holland), April 13.



to our eyes. A little later, there suddenly arise flames, and Trescault is doomed to destruction. Everywhere explosions are heard and a terrific heat reaches us. Then we, too, are seized with the madness of destruction and set fire to everything. All Trescault is in flames, and a marvellous spectacle, one that I shall never forget, meets the eye. On a little hill stands a wonderful castle, spared by us until the last moment. We spared it because we were quartered there. But the castle must go too, and quickly the flames envelop it, and this building as well is burnt to the foundations and Trescault laid level with the earth. Where before was a flourishing village and a peaceful people, is now a heap of ruins. Far indeed did the destructive fury of the 230th extend. The Russians themselves have wrought no worse havoc than this, and we can scarcely be looked upon as soldiers. When we are up at the Front, it is as if we were the greatest of criminals. Thus it is that we do our work of destruction in France on the Somme. Picture to yourself how we live now—not like men, but like beasts. Far and wide there are no trenches, only bare fields and stumps of trees growing where once Man, the chosen of God, ploughed his fields and worked for wife and child. That is our retirement, and our part in it—not as you will see it written—for these are observations founded on experiences of my own, experiences which I can never forget. Well, enough of it. It is possible that I shall not

be able to write again for a long while. You must forgive me, and if God will that I come back safe, I shall write at once. All the same, my mind cannot dispel dark thoughts and fears that I shall not return."

Some of the Germans who did this work even expressed their dislike of it to the French inhabitants. They had no choice, they declared; it was the orders of the High Command; and the High Command itself had to take cognisance of this feeling among its tools. "The burning of houses," it is propounded in a German order of the day, "is obviously regrettable, and we are the first to deplore it. But it is a necessary evil and a lawful weapon in the hands of a nation which is fighting for existence." And when once the rank and file had set their hands to the work, they were "seized with the madness of destruction," and carried out their orders to the letter. Indeed, they were in an evil mood. "They came in singing in 1914," said a woman of Nesle, "but they left in silence." That was on March 18th, 1917.

As they went, they left their trail on the roads to the east. "The giant trees of the avenues have been felled and thrown across roadways," writes the correspondent of the *Lokalanzeiger*, and so indeed they were found; but there were other forms of devastation which could not be justified by any military effects. Farm implements had been gathered in heaps and burnt to ashes;



country waggons had been sawn in half and the spokes hacked out of the wheels. At the *Château of Guyencourt*, which they passed on their way, they broke open a sarcophagus and scattered the bones.

Their living victims were more pitiful than the dead. "It is as terrible as anything on the battlefield," the *Times* correspondent records, "to see children who have been slowly starving for a year wandering about amid the ruin of their home. They are wan little ghosts, with bluish faces and heavy-lidded eyes. . . . There were so many such children. I saw one frail woman load a barrow with what she could find in the ruin the Germans had made of her home—the last article was a doll without a head—and trundle the cargo away with four shy, weak little figures clinging to her skirts, who made as painfully sad a group as I have ever seen."

The people were starving because the Germans had stripped the country of livestock, poultry and agricultural produce. "We shall never forget the American relief," they said to the American war-correspondents; \* "It saved us. Almost from the beginning of the German occupation we had nothing else." They pressed the Americans to drink the American coffee and taste the American sugar which had kept them alive. "It would have kept them properly nourished as well, if they

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\* Associated Press and United Press cables, March 22.

had really received all the food that was landed at Rotterdam by the Relief Committee's ships; but the Germans broke their solemn pledge to let this food pass through to the people for whom it was meant. They adulterated the Committee's white flour, issuing a sticky, black substance to the inhabitants and keeping the balance for themselves; latterly they had appropriated three quarters of the Committee's ration for their own use.\* By this robbery of the neutrals' supplies, in addition to the confiscation of the local resources, they had reduced the civil population to extremities. "A packet of well-buttered ham-sandwiches distributed among the children in one village caused greater excitement than the evacuation of the Germans." † The people had had no meat for six months, and there had been no milk for the babies since the Germans had "requisitioned" the last cows. "Hundreds of villages have been pillaged and burnt," the correspondent of the United Press cabled on March 21st; "fruit orchards have been levelled; the room-walls in houses spared in the retreat have been clotted and smeared with filth, mirrors smashed, friezes pick-axed. But most tragic of all are the human wrecks left behind—staring at the incoming British and French troops with eyes made mild by suffering. Their faces wear blank

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\* *Times*, March 23; Associated Press and United Press cables, March 21.

† Associated Press cable, March 22.

expressions, because behind them are brains dulled by lack of proper sustenance. The faces of the babies and younger children are especially pitiful—colourless, with black circles under the eyes."

*Rouy-le-Petit*,\* east of Nesle along the road to St. Quentin, was another concentration centre for the civilians the Germans chose to leave behind. They collected 200 men, women and children in Rouy from the neighbourhood, appropriated £10,000 in notes and securities, and then evacuated the place. The British marched in, the people flocked into the street to welcome their deliverers, and the German batteries chose this moment to send a rain of shells into the village. They may allege that they were aiming at the Allied troops; the effect was to wound and kill a number of those children and old people who had been in their power for over two and a half years, at the moment when they believed that their salvation was at hand.

One of the survivors of this bombardment was an old man of sixty-five. He belonged originally to a village three miles north-west of St. Quentin, but for over a year he had been forced to labour, with hundreds of his fellow-countrymen, on the new German lines. Belgian deportees and Russian prisoners were also employed on this work—it

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\* Associated Press and United Press cables, March 21; United Press cable, March 22; French Protest.

may possibly have been one of the principal motives for the Belgian deportations, which began in the autumn of 1916.

At *Rouy-le-Grand*,\* over 400 women and children between the ages of fifteen and fifty were carried off by the Germans for some kind of forced labour behind their new front.

At *Ham*, on the Somme, General von Fleck, commanding the 17th German Corps, carried away with him the furniture of the house which he had occupied in the town.† The French Government adds, in its Protest to Neutral States, that the case was not an isolated one.

At *Roye*‡ the French troops found about 800 civilians when they entered the town. Practically every house had been pillaged, the Mairie had been blown up, and also, to deface the town still further, the four houses at the corners of the principal square. "In one house in particular," states the correspondent of the *Times*, "every single thing that could be smashed—crockery, pictures, looking-glasses, furniture, and even the piano—had been hammered to pieces, not by shells, but by the hands of presumably drunken soldiers."

It was even worse at *Cressy*, a village east of Roye. There had been no fighting at Cressy during the whole course of the war, yet everything was destroyed by the Germans before their retreat,

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\* United Press cable, March 22.

† French Official, March 22.      ‡ *Times*, March 20.

in cold blood—" buildings, orchards and agricultural implements. The walls of the houses have been burst with dynamite or burnt, the reapers and binders collected and broken, and the orchards cut down." \*

At *Noyon*,† the Germans carried off 50 girls, between the ages of 15 and 25, "to act as officers' servants." On the other hand, some thousands of civilians were driven in from the neighbourhood and concentrated there. "We have had enough of being Boches," said one of them to her fellow-countrymen, when the French troops arrived. The Germans had promised the representatives of the Neutral Relief Committee on the spot to leave sufficient supplies to feed this mass of refugees until the Allied armies could organise their revictualment, and in their official communiqué of March 19th they made the general statement that "a portion of the population, after being supplied with five days' provisions, was left behind." Yet the last German patrols to leave *Noyon* "completely sacked the American Relief storehouse of all eatables, then dynamited the building, and finally turned the canal water, with which they had flooded part of the city, into the ruins."

The road from *Noyon* to *Chauny*, up the Oise, was bordered by orchards on either hand; passing them in their retreat, the Germans killed the

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\* *Times*, March 23.

† French Official, March 20.

fruit trees. "Every one of them has been killed," writes the *Times* correspondent on March 21st, "within a certain distance of the road—for the thing was obviously done in a hurry, when they found that they were bound to retreat. They have either been sawn through a couple of feet from the ground and left lying where they fell, or else a gash 3 or 4 inches deep has been hacked in a complete circle round the trunk. The gashes are quite fresh."—"It is a fairly easy matter to fire a village," writes another correspondent on March 24th, "and of a score of villages I went over yesterday, east of the Somme, only one was not a smouldering ruin. But to cut down all the orchards was a larger and harder task, and there are signs that the enemy was interrupted in his work. He tried putting explosive charges in the roots, and finally he ringed the trees. He meant to damage more severely some of the larger towns, but circumstances prevented him." The German General Staff inspired the correspondent of the *Lokalanzeiger* to boast that "Noyon, Roye and other places behind our old position where civilians had been concentrated, were abandoned to the enemy practically without fighting, in order that these civilians might suffer as little as possible of the horrors of battle." This apparently complacent assertion may cloak an apology from the German High Command to the German nation for the unpalatable fact that the devastation had been incomplete.



But the mutilated orchards were not the saddest sight on the road from Noyon to Chauny, for, advancing along this road, the French soldiers met the French refugees.

The *Times* correspondent\* describes the spectacle: "Each of the tiny parties was the same—a woman wheeling a perambulator containing all the worldly possessions that the enemy had left her, and generally a baby as well, and two or three other children walking beside her. They were even more pathetic than the crowds of refugees one used to see in the early days of the war, because not only had they lost practically everything that they cared for, but they had passed, as well, two dreary years under the dominion of the enemy. Most of them had sweet, Madonna-like faces. . . ."

The Germans were shelling Chauny that afternoon—though they had left little standing to shell, for they had burnt most of the houses before they left. "In house after house," writes the *Times* correspondent,† "they have pillaged every room that they had not set on fire, and taken all the contents away with them, or else, more vilely still, they have smashed them to atoms."

There was a low-mindedness and obscenity about the whole conduct of the devastation, which can only be paralleled by what the Germans did when they first swarmed over Belgium and France in 1914. *Bapaume*, states another corre-

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\* Despatch of March 21, published on March 22.

† Despatch of March 21.

spondent of the *Times*,\* “has been deliberately converted into a mass of muck. . . . There was much in Bapaume to make the mind and the stomach sick, but among the broken mirrors and crockery, smashed furniture, plaster, and old papers of what had been a stationer’s shop in the city, that photographic enlargements of a group of three little girls, evidently once a family treasure, had been made foul as an insult by a German trooper, was the trivial but ultimate piece of sickening evidence.”

This, though it is only one instance out of many, might be put to the account of an individual soldier—feeble-minded, degenerate or criminal. The percentage of this type in the composition of the German Army must be high indeed, if the irresponsible actions of such individuals are to account for all the vileness which that Army commits. But does this explanation cover the thefts of General von Fleck at Ham, or the blowing up of the historic *Château of Coucy*,† one of the national monuments of France? If the German rank and file has its contingent of degenerates and criminals, who act after their kind, the German High Command is criminal in a deeper sense, and organises its abominations with cold malice.

This short survey of what the Germans have done—and it only covers a few places in the

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\* Despatch of March 21.

† French Official, March 20.



districts evacuated by them in the first days of their retreat—supplements the inspired confessions of the correspondent of the *Lokalanzeiger* with two damning facts which he was careful not to admit:—

1. It is doubtless true, as the German correspondent states, that a definite zone of French territory, “from  $6\frac{1}{4}$  to  $7\frac{1}{2}$  or 8 miles wide,” was devastated by the orders of the German High Command several weeks in advance. But it is further proved that the German Army, in the actual course of their retreat, pillaged and burned and destroyed in every part of the territory behind their old lines, including the places which they profess, pharisaically, to have spared.

2. It is also true that they committed every kind of devastation that could hinder or embarrass the military operations of the Allied armies, and they claim with unction that they were entitled to do this by the customs of war. But the evidence already before the world proves that military considerations, even if interpreted in the widest sense, only account for a fraction of what they did. They destroyed for the sake of destroying—to vent their spite and discomfiture and impotent rage.

This spirit of the Germans in retreat can hardly be expressed in any language but their own, and when all is said, the last word of condemnation has to be left to them.

“And here,” writes a German spectator at

*Ham* on March 9th,\* “ we came upon the Empire of Death—a Death which lays the shrivelled hands of destruction upon all the works of men and all the bloom of Nature. . . . We are in that broad zone of devastation which stretches from the Scarpe to the Aisne. . . .

“ A year back and earlier I was so often in this country—and I do not know it again. The war has set its mark upon it. Old giant trees once stood here on either side of the road—they are no more. There were houses by the road and farms. There is nothing left of all that, and nothing of the bloom and prosperity of the country-side. As far as the eye can see, the land is bare and desert, a uniform, forbidding, open field of fire, through which the ribbon of road we are following runs as a last remnant of extinct civilisation. And even the road will only give passage for a few days longer across the desert. At the crossways it is mined. . . .

“ Troops meet us on the march and waggons piled high with the men’s kit and properties. They have packed up at the front and have left those who will succeed them in the abandoned places nothing, nothing whatever, not a tub, not a bench. And what they could not take with them they have burnt or smashed. They have blown up behind them the shelter in which they had lodged ;

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\* “Abschied von der Somme,” Part II., by Karl Rosner (*Lokalanzeiger*, March 27).

they have filled up or made undrinkable the wells that gave them water ; they have destroyed the lighting and set the barracks on fire.

“ We push on further into the undulating distance caught in the paralysis of death, and its horror knows no end. Here there once stood villages on either hand, estates, chateaux—all gone. Burnt-out ruins with a spark glowing here and there are the only vestige left of the past that has been swept away—and in the air a sharp, pungent smoke from green wood, beds, dung-heaps, still smouldering. Occasionally, in the distance, the fires still flicker on into the light of day—yellow flames, which now and then veil themselves completely in murky smoke, and then shoot up again, hungry yet almost colourless in the bright light. Any piece of wall that still stands after the burning, is blown up or battered down by engineers. The enemy, when they come, shall not find here so much as a miserable half-burnt wall to shelter them from the wind. Even the cellars have been blown up. But all this is not the work of a few days ; it was carried out systematically for weeks and months on end—it had to take months, if it was to pass unnoticed by the enemy. A zone of burning villages would have shown the enemy airmen in a flash what was afoot. No, one village was burnt somewhere one day, and the next day, if the weather was hazy and there was low visibility, two more somewhere else went up in smoke and flames. For the final

days nothing was left but what was needed up to the last moment for the accommodation of the troops. And now the sorry remnant goes to ruin, that this stern work of destruction may be complete. . . .”

And here is what another writes, towards the end of March, from a place unnamed in the devastated region :—\*

“ It looked like a house-moving of humble folk—mattresses and chairs, with an occasional sewing-machine or hen-coop, and then a fine array of dismantled doors and windows and anything else that seemed worth carrying away from the houses that a few hours later were to go up in smoke and flames. And they sawed away tree trunks—fine, sound, solid wood. . . .

“ And the desert, a pitiful desert leagues wide, bare of trees and undergrowth and houses ! They sawed and hacked ; trees fell and bushes sank ; it was days and days before they had cleared the ground. In this war zone there was to be no shelter, no cover. The enemy’s mouth must stay dry, his eyes turn in vain to the wells—they are buried in rubble. No four walls for him to settle down into ; all levelled and burnt out, the villages turned into dumps of rubbish, churches and church towers laid out in ruins athwart the roads.

“ Smouldering fires and smoke and stench ;

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\* “ Abschied von der Somme,” by Georg Querl, *Berliner Tageblatt*, March 26.

a rumble spreading from village to village—the mine charges are still doing their final work, which leaves nothing more to do.

“ It is not so easy to scatter a whole village into brick-dust. There are hundreds of villages out there which were under fire for weeks on end, yet still showed a wall or two and an occasional roof. . . . But when our engineers get to work on a village, our engineers ! Then it goes into the air as if a mighty earthquake had caught it, it crumbles and breaks up and falls, and the last pitiful houses are knocked out by the *coup de grace*. And what a rubbish-heap there lies spread—bricks and clay and stones and timbers licked by the flames. Poor devil of a war-zone, seek your habitation elsewhere ! Old-time farms with massive walls, vaulting, and any amount of resisting power—their walls were drilled scientifically, and the charges fired. Then the whole farm crumpled up, just as it was intended to do—half over the road which it was its business to bury, and the other half into the cracking cellars.

“ Rubble, nothing but rubble, all this ancient village history, all these future prospects of modern peasant life. The fine broad yard sinks away with the cottage ; the cottage burns quietly to ashes, and the remains of its clay walls yield to the first serious stroke of the battering-ram. The great farm buildings put up a defence—only to fly into the air, rain down again, and mingle themselves with their neighbours' misery in a

field of ruins which once bore a name and paid a rent.

“ Let them see it over there ! Let them see it over there ! This fearful naked war should be reflected in all the shop windows of the Boulevards. We have put distance between us and our enemies. It is a desert full of wretchedness. . . .

“ Farewell, comrades of the Somme ! The earth which drank your blood is upheaved and torn asunder. It is made unfruitful, it is turned into a desert, and your graves are made free from the dwellings of men. Those who tread it, your desert, will be greeted by our shells.”

This is the burnt-sacrifice which Germany offers her dead.

## II.—Motion for and Discussion of a Proposed Resolution.

*EXTRACT from the Proceedings of the French  
Senate : Session of March 31, 1917.\**

*The President of the Senate.*—I have received from MM. Cuvinot, Reynald, Hervey, Henry Chéron, Magny, Eugène Mir, Mougeot, Galup, Servant and Sauvan a proposal for a resolution denouncing the criminal acts committed by the enemy in the regions of France occupied by him. It is couched in these terms :—

“ The Senate,  
“ Denouncing to the civilised world the criminal acts committed by the Germans in the regions of France occupied by them, crimes against private property, against public buildings, against the honour, the liberty and the life of individuals ;

“ Recognising that these acts of unparalleled violence have been perpetrated without the excuse of military necessity of any kind, and in systematic contempt of the International Convention of October 18, 1907, ratified by the representatives of the German Empire ;

“ Holds up to universal execration the authors of these crimes, the stern repression

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\* From the *Journal Officiel* of April 1, 1917.



of which is demanded by justice ; (*Applause.*)

“ Offers its respectful sympathy to the victims, to whom the nation gives a solemn pledge, for which it will itself be guarantee, that they shall obtain full reparation from the enemy ; (*Hear, hear.*)

“ Affirms more resolutely than ever the determination of France, supported by her admirable soldiers, and in concert with the Allied Nations, to carry on the struggle that has been imposed upon her, until such time as German Imperialism and Militarism, which are responsible for all the misery, ruin and mourning heaped upon the world, have been finally crushed.” (*Hear, hear ! and unanimous applause.*)

In accordance with the regulations, I have to consult the Senate as to the precedence which is asked for in the passing of the resolution, and also as to the reference of the proposition to the Commission concerned with the damage caused by acts of war.

I put the question of precedence to the vote.  
(*Precedence voted.*)

*The President of the Senate.*—If there is no opposition, the proposal of the resolution will be referred to the Commission concerned with the damage caused by acts of war. (*Agreed.*)

I will now make way for M. Chéron, who will lay his conclusions before us.

*M. Henry Chéron.*—Gentlemen, on the very morrow of the day on which the tenacity and



valour of our soldiers and the soldiers of our Allies forced upon the enemy his retreat from the Somme, a worthy pendant to his defeat on the Marne, your Commission on damage of war charged a certain number of delegates to visit the re-conquered districts. Its object was to obtain information concerning the incidents into which you have empowered it to enquire.

They would perhaps have given the results of their mission in a simple report, had not their observations revealed to them such violations of the laws and customs of war, such crimes on the part of the occupying forces, such a profound contempt for the most elementary rules of public conscience, that they have felt it their duty to denounce these misdeeds here without delay. Inadequate though it be, this will constitute a preliminary homage to those principles of truth, right, and justice which no nation, however powerful, can in our days flatter itself that it can violate with impunity. (*Hear, hear! and applause.*)

But first of all, gentlemen, can we fail to recall that Germany gave her solemn adhesion to the International Convention, signed at the Hague on October 18, 1907, wherein the high contracting parties, taking into consideration the eventuality of war, and animated, as they expressly stated, "by a desire to further the interests of humanity and the growing demands of civilisation in this extreme hypothesis," laid down for the guidance of military authorities occupying the territory of

an invaded State the following rules, which we shall do well to read again.

“ Art. 46.—Family honour and right, the lives of individuals and private property, as well as religious convictions and the observances of public worship are to be respected. Private property cannot be confiscated.

“ Art. 47.—Pillage is explicitly forbidden. (*Exclamations.*)

“ Art. 50.—No collective penalty, pecuniary or otherwise, can be inflicted on populations as a punishment for individual actions for which they cannot be held responsible as a whole.

“ Art. 55.—The occupying Power must consider itself only as the administrator and temporary recipient of the income arising from the public buildings, house property, forests and agriculture of the enemy State within the occupied territory ; it must safeguard the funds of these properties, and administer them in accordance with the rules of usufruct.

“ Art. 56.—The property of Communes and of religious establishments dedicated to worship, charity, education and the arts and sciences, will be treated as private property even when these institutions belong to the State. All seizure, destruction or wilful dilapidation of such establishments, of historic

buildings, of works of art or of science is forbidden, and should be punished."

In addition, gentlemen, in the preamble to this Convention of 1907, solemnly ratified, as you will again note, by the German Empire, the following passage occurs:—

"In cases which do not come under the regulations adopted by the Powers, populations are under the safeguard and governance of the principles of international law as manifested in the customs established between civilised nations, the laws of humanity, and the demands of public conscience."

Finally, Article 1 of the Fourth Convention of October 18, 1907, stated:

"The contracting Powers will give to their armed forces on land instructions conformable to the regulations concerning the laws and customs of war on land appended to the present Convention."

This was the pact to which the German Empire set its signature.

Gentlemen, the principle on which this Convention was based was that war should be waged between armies and not on non-combatants, (*Hear, hear!*) and that everything possible should be done to spare the civil population those horrors, the effects of which they are in any case doomed to feel only too acutely. (*Further approbation.*)

What respect have the Germans shown for this international treaty? Like all the rest, it was for them nothing but a scrap of paper. They have trampled upon it so ruthlessly that we should have to go back to the primitive ages, to the most barbarous epochs of remote history, to find parallels for their acts of Vandalism and bestial ferocity, parallels which even then fall far short of the acts to which we can bear witness. (*Hear, hear! and loud applause.*)

The delegates of the Commission have visited the whole of the re-conquered area.

While M. Paul Doumer and a certain number of our colleagues went to Chauny and the country north-east of Soissons, our party, including MM. Hervey, Reynald, Eugène Mir, Mougeot, Galup, Servant and Magny, visited the districts of Noyon, Guiscard, Ham, Lassigny, Roye, Nesle and Péronne.

We went over these towns and some fifty villages very carefully. We were anxious to compare the information we had received with the first enquiries instituted in the name of the Government, either by the Commission presided over by M. Georges Payelle, First President of the Audit Department, or by the Director of the Legal Department of the War Office and of Military Justice, as representative of the Minister of War.

This is equivalent to telling you that we offer you to-day the gist of information which is as

exact as possible, and in dealing with which, whatever our legitimate indignation against the Germans may have been, we have, I can assure you, been careful not to give way to any passion that might tend to pervert truth. (*Hear, hear! and numerous marks of approbation.*)

Indeed, the truth itself is so horrible that nothing could have been gained by exaggerating it. Everywhere we have been the witnesses of the same appalling sights: the results of pillage, systematic destruction, and acts of barbarity committed without the slightest excuse on the grounds of military necessity.

I need hardly tell you that we made a very sharp distinction between the damage caused by military operations and that due to the deliberate action of the enemy.

We have dismissed everything which was the consequence of fighting—fighting sometimes so fierce and terrible that it has levelled and destroyed everything, wiping out all traces of houses and of the very stones.

What we have recorded are the acts of violence perpetrated in cold blood among an unarmed population, evil for the sake of evil, pillage, destruction of private property and of public buildings, outrages on the life, liberty and honour of individuals—all things which ought to be denounced before the whole world (*Hear, hear! and lively applause*), if only to stigmatise and dishonour for all time the accursed race and

régime which claim to dominate other nations and impose on them their culture—a culture already adopted in all countries by the most notorious burglars. (*Repeated applause.*)

Now for the facts. From Ribécourt to Noyon every farm is destroyed. At Noyon, the town does not seem to have suffered much externally, though the barbarians blew up a certain number of houses and destroyed factories. But internally, gentlemen, the most odious pillage was practised. All household furniture has been carried off.

*M. Aimond.*—The commanding officers set the example

*M. Henry Chéron.*—All that was not carried off was destroyed ; looking-glasses were shattered by revolver shots.

In a room in the Hôtel du Nord we found, in the midst of *débris* of every kind, a safe that had been broken open with a jemmy. This hotel was the quarters of the Kommandantur. (*Exclamations and uproar.*)

*A great number of Senators.*—Brigands.

*M. Guilloteaux.*—These are their arms !

*M. Henry Chéron.*—From the beginning of their occupation they pillaged the shops. On the 6th, 7th, and 8th of March, 1915, in the presence of the Deputy Mayor of Noyon, and in spite of his vigorous protests, they broke open the safes of the Société Générale. They used blow-pipes for this purpose.

The chief of the Kommandantur superintended



this burglary in person. Seals were afterwards affixed, but these were subsequently broken. Before leaving Noyon, they took everything that was in the safes.

*M. Jénouvrier.*—Thieves !

*M. Henry Chéron.*—On February 24, 1917, an officer, who announced himself as the delegate of the Treasury at Berlin, presented himself to M. Brière, a banker of Noyon, aged seventy-two, and ordered him to open his safes. M. Brière refused. Soldiers then forced them by means of a blow-pipe. The persons who rented the safes were present. Their protests were fruitless.

The Germans carried off everything that was in the bank : specie, deeds, bonds, bills and drafts, jewellery, plate, ledgers and archives. When the banker pointed out to the German officer that the archives could be of no use to him, he answered drily : “ I have orders to empty the safes, and I am emptying them.”

*M. Ranson.*—Thief !

*M. Guilloteaux.*—Like Bonnot’s gang !

*M. Henry Chéron.*—The same operation was carried out on February 27, 1917, in Chéneau and Barbier’s Bank, where two German officers and two soldiers went into the basement, forced the safes by means of blow-pipes, and stole the securities.

Finally, on March 16, the Germans, having previously mined a certain number of houses and public edifices, blew up some twenty buildings.

The villages round Noyon fared no better. The pillage at Sempigny was exceptionally ruthless and barbarous. In all the houses there is a deposit of some 30 centimetres of filth. A china dealer was treated with especial brutality. On the eve of their retirement the Germans brought him out of his house, and while he stood looking on in the street, the soldiers smashed all the crockery in his house with mallets.

A householder of Sempigny, M. Cabrol, left his safe open, in order to show that there was nothing in it, and so avert its destruction ; the Germans gutted it all the same.

At Guiscard the enemy was preparing to burn the entire village when the French arrived. This left him no time to do so, but he carried off everything of any value—furniture, linen and kitchen utensils—and smashed the looking-glasses. The soldiers stole the mattresses under the superintendence of their officers.

We entered what had been a chemist's shop. Among *débris* of every kind we found family portraits which had been slashed with knives.

Filth had been deposited everywhere. They have taken away all the gutters from the houses, the bells from the church, and even the works of the clock.

At Ham they have worked utter havoc at the canal entrance. Deliberate destruction and pillage are everywhere apparent.

The two finest houses in the town had been



allotted, one to the officers as a casino, the other to General von Fleck. Here, again, the Germans carried off everything of value and destroyed the rest. They went so far as to saw through the door-posts, smash the windows with hammers, and tear down and trample upon the chandeliers. To complete their work they deposited excrements in the pianos.

*M. Guilloteaux.*—That is their sign-manual.

*M. Henry Chéron.*—In the district between Ham and the canal they destroyed everything by incendiarism.

It was the same at Esmerly-Halon, where they distinguished themselves by burning the church-tower, and also at Eppeville and Verlaines. At Erchen and Solente everything is destroyed.

At Champien, in the midst of the ruins, there is a German burial-ground with an allegorical monument at the back of it representing Peace! The barbarians have had the effrontery to inscribe the following words on this monument: "To the memory of our comrades, friends and foes alike, united in death."

*M. Guillaume Chastenot.*—Hypocrites!

*M. Henry Chéron.*—Yes, what hypocrisy! An officer told us that in this same graveyard a coffin had been exhumed, and the remains of the dead had been replaced by filth.

Destruction was general and methodical at Roiglise, Avricourt, Amy and Margny-aux-Cerises, where we found one of the battering-rams with

which the barbarians destroyed the houses. It is the old Roman ram, adapted to this sinister task. A particularly odious Saxon regiment was responsible for these deeds in the neighbourhood of Margny. In this commune the Germans violated the graves in the churchyard in order to put their own dead in them. They blew up the rest.

At Plessis-Cacheleux the destruction was no less systematic. From Plessis to Roye the country is nothing but a desert. Magnificent farms like La Bourresse are now desolate ruins.

At Roye there was systematic pillage in all the houses. At the lawyer's in particular everything was stolen and sacked. In every quarter there was systematic pillage and destruction. The church tower was deliberately thrown down. The bell is still inside it.

From Roye to Nesle all the villages, such as Carrépuis, Ballâtre, Marché, Rethonviller and Billancourt, were systematically destroyed.

At Nesle the Germans committed crimes of violence from the very beginning of their occupation. They made requisitions in the houses from attic to cellar, laying hands on everything they fancied in the way of household effects, especially wine. They carried off all the antique furniture: pictures, mirrors, clocks, candelabra, bronzes and artistic objects. When the furniture in a house was of any value, they arrested the owner as a spy and gutted his house while he was detained. A few days before their departure,

they declared that they had orders from their Emperor to pillage, sack and strip the houses. These orders were very thoroughly carried out by the 20th Regiment of Heavy Artillery, the 38th Infantry Regiment, and the 6th Jäger Regiment under instructions from General Hahn, commanding the 35th Division.

This officer set the example by having the furniture of a room he had occupied for four months removed. The church bells were thrown down from the belfries, and the pieces were sent to Germany. Finally, during the last week, that is to say from March 10 to March 17, they committed indescribable atrocities—setting fire to and destroying a certain number of houses, and poisoning wells, springs and fountains.

From Nesle to Péronne the country is a desert ; Herly was systematically gutted, the houses are in ruins, the château is burnt to the ground. At Manicourt and at Curchy everything is destroyed and burnt, as well as at Arrancourt-le-Petit, Puzeaux, Homiécourt, Marcheipot, Barleux and Flaucourt.

I will not dwell upon the spectacle of Villers-Carbonnel and Péronne, masses of ruins which have a tragic magnificence, just as I did not speak to you just now of Lassigny. For in these places the havoc was wrought in battle.

All that we ascertained in our inspection with regard to the systematic destruction of houses, churches and public buildings either by fire,

explosives or the battering-ram, was also witnessed by our colleagues, more especially at Chauny and to the north-east of Soissons.

At Chauny for two months they had been measuring the cellars of all the houses and calculating the quantity of explosives necessary to blow up each of them ; and then after an orgy of pillage, in which they carried off furniture, gutted safes and sacked churches, they systematically destroyed the town in the most thorough and ruthless manner by fires and mines for the space of a fortnight. Nothing is left of it, save a suburb into which they had herded the inhabitants, and which they subsequently bombarded. They aimed their shells more especially at the Institute of St. Charles, which served as an asylum for the aged, and to which they had themselves consigned the sick. The town of Chauny, which had a population of over 10,000, is now but a heap of ruins.

The inhabitants of the environs of St. Quentin who were expelled from the villages, bear witness to similar acts of Vandalism. Everywhere their furniture was either stolen or destroyed and their houses burnt or blown up. At Vaux-Roupy, the Germans blew up the chapel of the château and the tombs. At Seraucourt-le-Grand they had heard that there was the mortuary chapel of a family related to one of our most highly-esteemed colleagues. Anxious to add to the sufferings of their noble hostage, they blew up this chapel and

the tombs. Witnesses have declared to us that, before succeeding in this sinister task, they had to make three distinct attempts. (*Exclamations.*)

Side by side with statements of this first category, we have those of another order. We know that they pillaged and destroyed private property and public buildings. Let us now see how they behaved with regard to agricultural property, of which the Hague Convention binds the enemy in an invaded country to consider himself the administrator and temporary beneficiary.

In this connection they have committed an offence viler, more malicious, and more odious than all the rest. These criminals have cut down all the fruit trees.

*M. Guillaume Chastenet.*—And the other trees as well.

*M. Henry Chéron.*—And when they had not time to saw them through, they stripped them of their bark to make them die.

No words can describe the lamentable sight presented by what were once the orchards of this fertile agricultural district, where apple, pear and cherry trees, sawn off about 60 centimetres above the ground, lie strewing the soil with the wreckage of property deliberately destroyed. The roadsides are veritable cemeteries of trees. In the fields they have been cut down by thousands. What strategic object could be served by such Vandalism? They have even blown up some trees

with dynamite cartridges. It is destruction for destruction's sake, or rather the impotent rage of a nation jealous of France, which, unable to overcome her valour, tries, as it retreats, to annihilate all the sources of her wealth. (*Loud applause.*)

In certain communes, for instance at Ham, they forced the agricultural labourers of the district themselves to saw through the trees on which they had bestowed so much care in the past !

But you should witness the feeling of legitimate indignation which this abominable destruction has aroused. Our old R.A.T.'s, for the most part men from the land, who are repairing the roads with admirable energy, are especially exasperated by the massacre of the trees. They express their feelings by significant imprecations against the brigands, whom, with a sense of implacable justice, they long to call to account for their crimes. (*Applause.*)

It is thus, gentlemen, that Germany has respected the Hague Conventions dealing with private property, public buildings, and agriculture in an occupied country. Let us now see how she has regarded the honour, liberty and life of individuals.

We will not dwell upon the countless vexations our heroic people have had to endure at the hands of their persecutors for nearly three years : disputes about provisions, threats to the inhabitants if they would not share the American relief



supplies with the soldiers, the seizure of the most necessary articles of daily use.

At Roye they gradually despoiled the highly-respected mistress of a boarding-school, established there since 1870, of her whole stock of bedding. On the plea that they had installed her in a neighbouring house, and were therefore at liberty to pillage her home, they robbed her even of her own mattress and spring mattress ! At Margny-aux-Cerises, a German soldier threatened to beat a young girl who was nobly watching over her paralysed mother and sick grandmother, and who had taken in a blind neighbour as well, if she would not give him all the bread and potatoes she possessed. This gallant little French woman had to fight for the food of the three sufferers whose guardian angel she was at the risk of her life. (*Loud applause.*)

The inhabitants of the evacuated villages say that nothing was left them to eat ; that they had to hide their potatoes ; that perquisitions were made in their houses perpetually ; that fines and imprisonment were of daily occurrence.

An agricultural worker of Attilly told us that one day towards noon—at the moment when the Germans were leaving—some soldiers appeared and said to him : “ We are going to blow up your house at one o’clock.” And they kept their word. At Guiscard they told us that in the middle of the winter they forced young girls to do work out of doors of the severest kind—to empty cess-



pools, for instance—without the slightest regard for their physical strength. The uniform penalty for refusal was imprisonment.

At Ham, when they were just going to blow up the fortress, they warned the inhabitants of their intention, announcing the hour at which the operation was to take place. The signal was to be given by bugle-call, and the population was to go to the church, taking provisions for two days. But they forestalled the appointed time, and suddenly fired the mine without warning anyone—at about 2 a.m., when the inhabitants were all in bed. There were several victims.

As a result of the misery to which the people were reduced, children died in large numbers everywhere.

At Noyon, the moment they arrived, on August 30, 1914, the German officers came to find the members of the municipality, at the head of whom was our heroic colleague Noël (*Applause*), who lately received the Cross of the Legion of Honour which he had so nobly gained. (*Renewed applause*). They insisted that these gentlemen should go to meet the column which was going to occupy the town. They forced them to march beside the commanding officer's horse. They could not keep up, and were mishandled. M. Jouve, the Deputy Mayor, fell down and was beaten with the butt-ends of rifles. A citizen of Noyon, M. Devaux, who had been taken as a hostage, was shot without cause behind the

Mairie. An officer fired a revolver in cold blood at the door-keeper of the Town Hall ; he missed him, but shortly afterwards the unfortunate man died as a result of the shock.

M. Richard, a baker, who was standing on his doorstep watching a group of French prisoners pass, with deep emotion, but without expressing his feelings in any way, was fired at and killed by a bullet in the stomach.

Madame Delbecq, who refused to give wine to a drunken soldier, was shot dead.

On February 18, after making all the inhabitants between the ages of fifteen and sixty spend the night in the college, the Germans sent them off into captivity. More than eighty young girls of the highest character were thus torn from their families, in spite of their tears and sobs.

Sister Superior St. Romuald made some particularly moving statements. When the Germans began to prepare for their retreat, she said, they expelled from 250 to 500 sick persons from the district of St. Quentin, and sent them to the civilian hospital at Noyon. They arrived in such a pitiable condition that seven or eight of them died every day.

They were people who had been dragged out of bed and given no time to take anything with them—paralysed and dying persons and nonagenarians ; there was even one woman of 102. A certain number of those who died had to be buried unidentified.

Madame Deprez, the owner of the Château of Gibercourt, was suffering from a very serious heart affection, which obliged her to keep her bed. A German officer arrived and ordered her to get up. The poor woman said she would obey, in spite of her malady ; she begged the officer to retire while she dressed. He refused, and insisted on her dressing in his presence.

Madame Bègue, of Flavy-le-Martel, had also an affection of the heart. She was carried off. Her two children, aged ten and seven, wished to go with her. The German officer drove them back. The poor little creatures clung to the wheels of the vehicle that they might not be separated from their mother. Unmoved by their tears and cries, the officer thrust them away brutally, and left them on the road.

*M. Bonnefoy-Sibour.*—The criminals !

*M. Couyba.*—Abominable !

*M. Henry Chéron.*—In all the villages they carried away captive the inhabitants between the ages of fifteen and sixty, excepting only women who had very young children dependent upon them.

A woman who lived at Holnon told us that they had taken away her boy of fourteen.

A superior officer in the French service reported to us that he had heard from witnesses a significant utterance by the German commandant of the fortress of Ham. He came upon a young girl of sixteen, and said : “ That one is for me ! ”  
(*Exclamations.*)

A woman of Ham told us that on February 10 she learned that there was going to be a deportation of 600 inhabitants. Beside herself with terror—for she had three daughters—she hurried to the Kommandantur. The news was correct. Orders had been given that the persons designated were to assemble in the courtyard of the castle with not more than 30 kilogrammes of baggage per individual.

At the same time an order was issued to all the inhabitants to bring their valuables with them, but this they disregarded. The three daughters of the witness were respectively 18, 20 and 26 years old. They went to the appointed place. From 10 in the morning to 3 in the afternoon the captives stood waiting in the piercing cold. Relatives came to bid them farewell, and heart-rending scenes occurred. The relatives were forcibly kept at a distance, mostly with the butt-ends of rifles. At 3 o'clock the prisoners were at last taken to the railway station. The Germans were callous enough to post a photographer to take a record of this lamentable procession. (*Exclamations.*) The mother of whom I told you has since learned that her daughters do no work, and that they are lodged in deserted houses. She has had no further news of them.

A person expelled from Seraucourt-le-Grand told us that on June 29 last, at the moment when our troops were delivering an attack, the Germans collected all the males between the ages of 17 and

55 in the public square to take them away into captivity. As their families came to bid them farewell, the Germans set up barriers and posted a machine-gun section to keep them at a distance.

One woman had to brave the soldiers to go to the help of her sick husband.

The sufferings of the people of Chauny were particularly terrible. For over thirty months they lived under the most humiliating and intolerable régime. They were forbidden to go out before eight o'clock in the morning; obliged to come in before seven, and to have no light in the houses during the night; and ordered to salute all German officers by removing their hats, on pain of imprisonment. On February 18 the Germans began to expel all the inhabitants between the ages of 15 and 60 years, sending them towards the North. On the 23rd they gave orders to the remnant of the population (about 2,000 persons) to assemble in front of the Town Hall. They herded all these persons together, with 3,000 inhabitants of the adjacent villages, into a suburb called Le Brouage. On March 3 there was a fresh muster of these unhappy creatures, without excepting the sick and infirm. They were passed in review for six hours in cold so intense that twenty-seven persons died the following day, and others on subsequent days. Then they were thrust into the cellars, where for over a fortnight they listened to the explosions in their

houses, which were blown up over their heads.  
(*Renewed exclamations.*)

The evacuation of some of the villages was carried out with no less cruelty. A tradeswoman of Gricourt told us that her sick husband had been driven out without regard to his condition. He died, and she is left with seven children. Other inhabitants of the same commune and of others adjacent to it told us that they were compelled to leave during the night. They travelled for some distance in cattle trucks, on a thick layer of manure. Then from Babeuf to Noyon they went on foot through the mud, with young children suffering from cold and hunger. A certain number of these unhappy creatures died on reaching the French lines. Everywhere the inhabitants were expelled in the same manner; the enemy allowed them insufficient food, and showed no sort of consideration for the weakness of children and sick persons. Seventeen old men from Roisel arrived in such a state of exhaustion as a result of privation that they died a few days later.

Gentlemen, such deeds are atrocious. But painful as it is to record them, and terrible as is the spectacle of ruin heaped on ruin, I must tell you that our visit has given us profound encouragement; for, after having ascertained and denounced the baseness of the oppressors, we had our homage to pay to the nobility of the victims.  
(*Lively applause from all parts of the assembly.*)



Not for one moment in the course of their long captivity did our compatriots despair of France ! Not for an instant did they lose faith in ultimate victory ! They spoke out, they proclaimed their confidence before our enemies, who were reduced to silence by their dignity, their pride and their courage. (*Renewed and unanimous applause.*)

It is also my duty—I must speak guardedly, for we must not be unduly optimistic ; but if you only knew how intense the optimism of these compatriots of ours is. . . . (*Lively applause*)—it is, I repeat, my duty to inform you what they all declared to us. In August, 1914, they had wept with rage on the arrival of the German Army, to see it so strong, so well equipped, so admirably victualled ; but they noticed that by degrees our enemies' spirits drooped. They declare that the Germans ran completely short of provisions during the last months. On this point identical statements were made to us on every hand. The bread ration of the German soldiers was almost uneatable. Very often they threw it away, and the dogs would not touch it. Nettle-soup, turnip-tops, and a sort of broth they called paste were the chief items of their diet. Their coffee was roasted barley. They were always trying to obtain food from the inhabitants\* out of the relief supplies distributed to the latter.

Scanty as their rations were, they sent a certain amount of them to their families in Germany, whose destitution, they declared, was extreme.

We do not suggest, gentlemen, that excessive



weight should be given to these statements. It would be childish to deny that our enemies may yet offer us most strenuous resistance—let us not deceive ourselves—but we are recording the truth when we tell you that our compatriots in the invaded districts noted among the German soldiers a great enfeeblement both moral and physical.

*M. Magny.*—Such is their unanimous testimony.

*M. Henry Chéron.*—As to their own sufferings, which have been so terrible that in many places our army doctors have reported cases of extreme exhaustion, our heroic compatriots expressed their feelings in this magnificent phrase: “We forgot everything when we saw French soldiers again.” (*Lively applause.*)

They were entirely possessed by the joy of recovering their country, that sweet and kindly France which we love each day the more because of all she suffers. (*Renewed applause.*) They brought out the tricolour they had carefully concealed for thirty months, and promptly hoisted it over the ruins of church or mairie. The children waved little flags. At the entrance to the town of Roye the inhabitants raised a triumphal arch for the entry of the French soldiers.

Gentlemen, if our compatriots have given themselves up so whole-heartedly to the solace of our return, we, for our part, must devote ourselves with equal wholeness of heart to the duty of avenging the crimes of which they have been the victims. (*Hear, hear! and applause.*)

Truly, justice would have died out of the world (*Renewed applause*) if such crimes, systematically committed by a nation. . . .

*M. Jénouvrier.*— . . . and by individuals. . . .

*M. Henry Chéron.*— . . . who boast of having applied all the discoveries of science to their purpose, could escape punishment.

Such crimes cry aloud for the triple penalty of international law, of penal law, and of the victory of the civilised world. (*Lively applause.*)

First, the penalty of international law. Gentlemen, in the Convention of October 18, 1907, there is an article which I have not yet read to you. I believe, indeed, that this article was inserted at the request of Germany.

*M. Etienne Flandin.*—That is the fact.

*M. Henry Chéron.*—I refer to Article 3 of Convention IV., which runs as follows: "Any belligerent party violating the said regulations shall be liable to pay an indemnity if there is occasion for it (*Hear, hear*), and shall be held responsible for all acts committed by individuals belonging to its armed forces."

Therefore they are materially responsible, they are pecuniarily responsible, and they shall pay. (*Loud applause.*)

But obviously we must not make our compatriots wait for this reparation. By virtue of the law of solidarity, which will shortly be laid before you by our distinguished colleague, M. Reynald, General Secretary of the Commission on Damage of War, you will be able to assign them the liberal

indemnities due to them, without any vexatious procedure, and *à fortiori* without any impossible conditions.

You will repair all that money can make good. But in the end the enemy will have to pay, for he is responsible according to universal law. (*Hear, hear !*)

But more than this. In our country, as in all civilised countries, blackmail and extortion, assaults upon the person, robbery with violence, and the destruction of public buildings, constitute offences or crimes. A judicial enquiry must be opened.

*M. Guilloteaux.*—Certainly.

*M. Henry Chéron.*—The guilty must be prosecuted and condemned. They are in default at the moment, but if ever, after the war, the burglars should be transformed into commercial travellers . . . (*Loud applause.*)

*M. Jénouvrier.*—They must be shot.

*M. Henry Chéron.*— . . . and should return to France, then we shall be able to make them expiate their crimes.

*A Senator of the Centre.*—They will not fail to come.

*M. Henry Chéron.*—Do you know how they show their regret for their crimes? One of our honourable colleagues, M. Ordinaire, recently read this sentence in the *Vossische Zeitung*: “Our troops are full of joy, the joy of having done evil to others.” In this phrase we have the whole German mentality.

As you see, they not only do not repent of the crimes they have committed, they proclaim them and boast of them ! They must be made amenable to penal law.

Finally, gentlemen, the essential penalty, without which all the others would be impossible, is victory. (*Loud applause.*)

Who now would dare to talk of peace with men who have ordered the abominable outrages I have just described ? (*Hear, hear !*)

*M. Ournac.*—Who would hold out a fraternal hand to them ?

*M. Henry Chéron.*—They must be beaten and overthrown.

*M. Jénouvrier.*—Beaten to their knees.

*M. Henry Chéron.*—German militarism must disappear under the ruin it has so odiously wrought. Whatever may be the necessary efforts and privations we may have to endure, and the sacrifices we may have to make, we can only stop when Germany has been finally defeated. Any sort of compromise would be treachery. (*Hear, hear ! and applause.*)

But, indeed, we have only to look around us, and we shall be able to take any resolution that may be necessary. The whole world is rising to help us and our Allies, afire with liberty, to defend the cause of law and civilisation. All the moral forces of the universe are coalescing to prevent the suppression by violence of all that constitutes the honour and the life of nations. The barbarians are lost, for they are pursued and already

overtaken by universal malediction. (*Loud applause.*)

Gentlemen, at this moment, when imminent justice is making ready to chastise those who have plunged so many millions of families into mourning, if we needed a renewed impulse of energy to nerve us for our final effort, to strengthen us for our decisive and liberating blow, would it not be easy for us to derive the necessary virtues from the sublime example of our compatriots in the invaded districts? Ah! we behind the lines have indeed little right to complain. (*Applause.*)

*Many voices.*—True, indeed!

*M. Henry Chéron.*—No one whose family and home are intact has a right to murmur at the petty inconveniences caused by the war, when others, who have seen their houses destroyed and their wives and daughters carried away into captivity, have borne their trial valiantly and without fainting. (*Unanimous applause.*)

No one will be able to think without a blush of the miserable profits to be made out of the war. (*Hear, hear! and loud applause.*) when others have seen all their fortune shattered, and for three years, as if that were not enough, have often had to suffer hunger. (*Renewed applause.*)

No one, finally, can lack absolute confidence in the ultimate issue without shame and remorse, when our compatriots, who have lived in close contact with these monsters for thirty months, assert that they are wavering, that they are exhausted, that they are beaten. (*Loud applause.*)

Moreover, and I will conclude with these words, if there should ever be one amongst us who could believe in the belated, hypocritical, and self-seeking repentance of those who have violated every treaty and every promise—nay, more, if after the war there should be any hearts so weak as to forget that hatred of Germany is henceforth the most sacred of duties (*repeated applause*), the most elementary homage we can pay to humanity, then we shall be there, to evoke the spectacle of the women and children of Northern France, led into captivity across the devastated roads and fields of their country, and to say: “This is what they would have done to the whole of France if they could.” (*True, true! Loud applause.*)

This is what they would do to-morrow, if they could.

But, gentlemen, we shall witness no such weakness.

The martyrdom of our compatriots has aroused a fresh impulse of stern justice in our souls. We will go on to the end, that is to say, to the time when, on the ruins of German imperialism and militarism, we shall be able to celebrate the triumph of peace, of liberty and of the indefeasible rights of the human conscience. (*Loud, reiterated and unanimous applause. As the orator returned to his seat, he received the congratulations of a large number of his colleagues.*)

*Many voices.*—We ask that the speech be printed and placarded.

*The President of the Senate.*—I put the proposal,



that M. Henry Chéron's speech be placarded, to the vote. (*Carried unanimously.*)

*The President of the Senate.*—I have received a request for immediate discussion of the motion, signed by the following twenty members : Messrs. Henry Chéron, Peyronnet, Reymoneuq, Surreaux, Cabart-Danneville, Petitjean, Astier, Chastenet, Mir, Peytral, Cuvinot, Ordinaire, Butterlin, Milan, Jénouvrier, Loubet, Milliès-Lacroix, Gabrielli, Flandin, and de Tréveneuc.

I put the question of immediate discussion to the Senate. (*Voted unanimously.*)

*M. René Viviani, Keeper of the Seals, Minister of Justice.*—I ask leave to speak.

*The President of the Senate.*—The Keeper of the the Seals will open the discussion.

*M. René Viviani, Keeper of the Seals, Minister of Justice.*—Gentlemen, the President of the Council, who, the day after his assumption of office, denounced the atrocities of the Germans to the civilised world, would certainly, had he not been detained elsewhere by official duties, have associated himself with the eloquent speech which you have just heard, and to which you have paid homage. In the name of the Government, I desire to offer my adhesion to the conclusions of the speaker. Like you, gentlemen, I have listened to this speech, to which you have so justly awarded the distinction due to it by deciding that it shall be made known to the whole country by the most emphatic method at your disposal. (*Hear, hear.*)



I have listened to this impressive speech, a speech as implacable as the indictment of a public prosecutor. These thefts, rapines, outrages, arsons, murders and massacres are not merely, gentlemen, as has been so justly remarked, offences against public law and attacks upon international honour; they are crimes in common law (*Applause*), recognised by the penal code of all civilised countries, and they must be met by precise and adequate evidence, as the preliminary to and foundation for the verdict of history.

The crimes themselves are the outcome of that defective psychology which in times past, as at present, has always impaired the German intellect.

Our enemies believe that by terrorising the world they will subdue it to their will. True, gentlemen, our consciences recoil before such an accumulation of crimes, but our souls are unshakeable. (*Hear, hear.*) Surely it is a small thing that they should remain as steadfast as those of our unhappy fellow-citizens who have been reduced to the status of subjects. . . .

*A Senator.*—Of slaves, rather. . .

*The Keeper of the Seals.*— . . . Have been watched and spied upon daily, yet remained indomitable, and received our liberating army with outstretched hands and dauntless hearts. We salute them in the misery they have so heroically borne for their country.

Our souls will remain unshakeable, and we shall endure to the end. But, gentlemen, if we are to go on to the end, we must conquer. (*Hear,*

hear.) We shall go on to victory ; for in victory alone is chastisement possible, and it is by the military force of France and of her Allies that we shall obtain reparation. (*Loud applause from all parts of the house.*)

*Many voices.*—We move that the speech be printed and placarded.

*M. Couyba.*—We request that the eloquent words spoken on behalf of the Government by the Keeper of the Seals be placarded, together with the deeply moving speech of our colleague M. Henry Chéron.

*The President of the Senate.*—Gentlemen, I move that the speech of the Keeper of the Seals be placarded after that of our colleague M. Henry Chéron.

I put this proposal to the vote. (*Carried unanimously.*)

*The President of the Senate.*—I call on M. Flandin to speak.

*M. Etienne Flandin.* — Gentlemen, I had intended to take part in the debate, but after such speeches as those we have just applauded, further discussion would be out of place ; we must lay these moving words to heart in silence and meditation. All I now wish to do is to insist on the declarations made by M. Henry Chéron and the Keeper of the Seals as to the importance of at once instituting criminal proceedings against the enemy in the liberated districts. (*Hear, hear.*) There is not the slightest doubt that the crimes committed are punishable by common law.

(*Hear, hear.*) and do not come into the category of acts of war. (*Renewed applause.*)

These crimes were committed on our territory ; they are punishable by our penal code and by our code of military law ; they are denounced by international law ; I may add that they are also recognised as punishable by the German penal code and German military law. Hence from every possible point of view we have the right to take public proceedings. A legal enquiry, collecting all available evidence, would enable us to identify crime and criminals.

And, then, if any of these should fall into our hands during the war, we should have at our disposal a legal indictment in due form, to ensure immediate expiation.

Criminal proceedings would offer a further advantage. They would enable us, when the time comes to consider peace terms, to adduce irrefutable documents in support of our claims for compensation—claims only too well founded, alas, under Article 3 of the Hague Convention, which, as M. Chéron reminded us just now, was inserted at the suggestion of Germany herself in the Regulations touching the laws and conventions of war.

After the unspeakable crime committed against the *Lusitania*, the English judge held enquiry and pronounced this verdict : “ This frightful crime is a violation of international law and of the conventions of every civilised country.” And he charged the officers of the German

submarine, the German Emperor and the German Government with the crime of wholesale murder.

Let us follow this precedent and open a formal, legal enquiry ; let us prepare our evidence for the day when the assizes of humanity shall at last be held (*Hear, hear.*)—assizes which will provide the loftiest lesson of morality and right that has ever been given to the world, the ransom of all our humiliation and bloodshed. (*Applause.*)

I look to the Government to call upon justice to perform its task, its whole task, and I trust to the irresistible ardour of our armies to give executive power to its decrees. (*Loud applause.*)

*The President of the Senate.*—If no one else proposes to speak, I put it to the Senate that we now discuss the proposal of the resolution

There is no opposition ?

I will read the proposed resolution :—

“ The Senate,

“ Denouncing to the civilised world the criminal acts committed by the Germans in the regions of France occupied by them, crimes against private property, against public buildings, against the honour, the liberty and the life of individuals ;

“ Recognising that these acts of unparalleled violence have been perpetrated without the excuse of military necessity of any kind, and in systematic contempt of the International Convention of October 18, 1907, ratified by

the representatives of the German Empire ;

“ Holds up to universal execration the authors of these crimes, the stern repression of which is demanded by justice ; (*Applause.*)

“ Offers its respectful sympathy to the victims, to whom the nation gives a solemn pledge, for which it will itself be guarantee, that they shall obtain full reparation from the enemy ; (*Hear, hear.*)

“ Affirms more resolutely than ever the determination of France, supported by her admirable soldiers, and in concert with the Allied Nations, to carry on the struggle that has been imposed upon her, until such time as German Imperialism and Militarism, which are responsible for all the miseries, ruin and mourning heaped upon the world, have been finally crushed.” (*Hear, hear ! and unanimous applause.*)

I put the proposal of the resolution to the vote.  
(*Carried unanimously.*)

*M. Léon Mougeot.*—In conclusion to the eloquent words we have just heard and the unanimous vote of the Senate, I move that the proposed resolution itself be printed and placarded. (*Lively applause.*)

*The President of the Senate.*—Under these circumstances, the resolution which the Senate has just unanimously adopted will be printed and placarded together with and following after the speeches of M. Henry Chéron and M. René Viviani.  
(*General approbation.*)

Auf dem 12. März 1918  
 In Bancourt Land mit den den den  
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CAPTURED GERMAN TABLE OF WORK TO BE CARRIED OUT AT  
 BANCOURT, A VILLAGE JUST EAST OF BAPAUME.

### TRANSLATION.

In the village of Bancourt, it is more important to set fire to the  
 houses than to blow them up.

5th March : Straw will be heaped and tarred.

10th March : Explosives are to be ready for the cellars and  
 walls in Bancourt.

11th March : All unused wells and watering ponds must be  
 plentifully polluted with dung and creosote soda.  
 Sufficient dung and creosote soda must be placed in  
 readiness beside the wells which are still in use.

12th March : Bancourt must be ready to be set on fire.

[SEE OVER]



13.3.	Agg. an Kirmeszug, Aufg. der reformierten Kirche, Schützenverein, Kirmeszug, Kirmeszug, Kirmeszug, Kirmeszug, Kirmeszug.
14.3.	1) Verteilung der Minen auf den Keller und Brunnen in Bancourt 2) Sprengen des Kirchturms Bancourt.
15.3.	
16.3.	3) Sprengen des letzten Brunnens in Bancourt 6.30. Nacht. Aufg. Kirmes
17.3.	3) Sprengen des Brunnens in Bancourt, 6, 7, 8.
18.3.	3) Sprengen des letzten Kellers in Bancourt.
19.3.	3) Sprengen von Bancourt

CAPTURED GERMAN TABLE OF WORK TO BE CARRIED OUT AT BANCOURT, A VILLAGE JUST EAST OF BAPAUME.

#### TRANSLATION.

- 13th March: Parade in fighting kit, issue of iron rations, cleaning of arms, instructions regarding safe roads to be used and instructions for the demolition party.
- 14th March: Explosives to be issued for destroying the cellars and wells in Bancourt. Bancourt church tower will be blown up.
- 16th March: All wells in Bancourt, with the exception of one, will be blown up by 5.30. p.m.
- 17th March: The road mines will be fired at 3 a.m. The remaining cellars in Bancourt will be blown up at 3.15. a.m., and Bancourt will be set on fire at 4 a.m.



### III.—German Atrocities in the Liberated Districts.

*OFFICIAL REPORT of the French Commission  
Appointed to Investigate Acts Committed by  
the Enemy in Violation of International Law.\**

MONSIEUR LE PRÉSIDENT DU CONSEIL,

We have just been over a part of the regions of the Oise, the Aisne and the Somme, which, after lying for over thirty months under German domination, have recently been delivered from its crushing and abominable yoke.

Every detail in the spectacle of devastation that met our eyes reveals a method so implacable and so strikingly uniform that it is impossible not to recognise the execution of a rigorously marked-out

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\* From *Le Temps* of April 18, 1917 :—

“To-morrow the *Journal Officiel* will publish the Report presented to the President of the Council by the Commission Appointed to Investigate Acts Committed by the Enemy in Violation of International Law. The members of the Commission are Messrs. Georges Payelle, First President of the Audit Department (*Cour des Comptes*); Armand Mollard, Minister Plenipotentiary; Georges Maringer, Councillor of State; and Edmond Paillot, Councillor of the Court of Appeal (*Cour de Cassation*).

“We are enabled to lay the complete text of this formidable indictment before our readers in advance.”

The Report was actually published in the *Journal Officiel* on the same date—April 18th.

plan. The enslavement of citizens, the carrying off of women and young girls, the pillage of homes, the annihilation of towns and villages, the ruin of industries by the destruction of factories, the desolation of rural districts by the shattering of agricultural implements, the burning of farms and the cutting down of trees, were all inaugurated at the same moment and with the same ferocity, to create poverty, inspire terror and generate despair.

In the majority of the places we visited, the enemy, at the beginning of his occupation, does not seem to have indulged in sanguinary excesses comparable in numbers to those which marked his furious course through Champagne and Lorraine. Nevertheless, in several places we were informed of murders and serious assaults upon the person.

At Noyon, immediately upon the arrival of the Germans on August 30, 1914, the two assistants of the Mayor, Messrs. Jouve & Félix, were compelled by an officer to accompany the Mayor, M. Noël, Senator of the Oise, to meet an approaching column, and were brought back into the town at the commanding officer's stirrup. On the way they were struck with the butt ends of lances, because they had difficulty in keeping up with the horses. Another inhabitant, M. Devaux, was selected to remain with them as a hostage at the town hall, and was shot dead by a soldier as he was coming out to fetch a handkerchief. The same day M. Momeux, the porter at the Mairie, who had not shown the slightest inclination to rebel, was shot at by

an officer with a revolver, and was subsequently so brutally treated that his health, which was already shaken, never recovered. He died some time afterwards, but undoubtedly as a result of the agitation he had suffered.

At Noyon, also, Madame Delbecq was shot dead by a drunken soldier to whom she had refused to give wine; and at the end of September, 1914, M. Richard, a baker, was mortally wounded by a bullet while he was quietly talking to one of his fellow-tradesmen on the latter's door-step. The Germans alleged that he had been the victim of carelessness on the part of one of their men, but this explanation was never clearly established.

On September 6 or 7 of the same year, at Roye, during the night, two soldiers shot down in succession Messrs. Colombier and Lesage. They had entered their house to ask for information, and the victims had been seized with panic and had attempted to escape.

At the beginning of October, 1914, the inhabitants of Verpillières were arrested on the quite unfounded pretext that they had been in telephonic communication with the French Army, and were taken to Avricourt, where a court-martial was sitting. After appearing before the court, twelve of them were marked with a blue cross on the right cheek. We have not yet received any information as to the fate of all these prisoners. We only know that M. Poizeaux, aged forty-seven, and M. Vasset, an old man of seventy

eight, were brought back to Verpillières and shot the same evening.

Finally, at about the same date, M. Denicourt, of Muille-Villette, at whose house a few carrier-pigeons had been found, was shot in one of the moats of the Château of Ham, in spite of the intervention of the mayor of the village, who vainly testified that the unfortunate man was not a pigeon breeder nor a member of any pigeon-fanciers' society.

Though murders do not appear to have been numerous in the districts we have visited so far, the occupation was certainly of a most rigorous nature. Requisitions were continual everywhere. The communes had to contribute to the maintenance of the troops quartered in their territory, and were compelled to pay enormous subsidies. To provide these when their pecuniary resources were exhausted, they were forced to form unions among themselves for the purpose of issuing paper-money in the form of warrants. Mayors who declined to come into this scheme were arrested and sent to Germany. The enemy gave these notes forced currency and put them into circulation himself. The inhabitants were subjected to vexations of every kind, and daily witnessed the theft of the few provisions they possessed and of the household objects most necessary to them. In the shops, officers and soldiers took as if by right all that they coveted. Thus at Ham, in M. Gronier's ironmongery shop,

an officer of high rank, said to have been the Grand Duke of Hesse, came to choose various articles, in payment for which he merely promised to send a warrant, which was never delivered.

Every moment our unfortunate fellow citizens had to endure fresh restrictions on their rights and fresh attacks upon their dignity—orders to be within doors by 7 o'clock in the evening, and not to go out before 8 o'clock in the morning ; prohibitions upon the burning of lights in houses during the night, injunctions to doff hats to officers in salutation ; compulsory labour in the fields—all enforced by terms of imprisonment and by fines, to which the inhabitants were continually exposed by the slightest infraction of the innumerable regulations. But nothing equals the abominations that occurred in certain communes, such as Fréniches, where, one day in May, 1915, all the young girls of the village were summoned to the house appropriated to the German military doctor and were subjected to the most brutal and revolting examination, in spite of their screams of protestation.

In February last, that is to say, at the moment when the Germans were beginning to prepare for their retreat, they committed the savage depredations which are now known to the entire world, and which revolt the universal conscience of mankind.

There had already been deportations of a large number of inhabitants, whom the invader, quite without mercy in breaking up families, had sent to

work in Germany or in the north of France. This measure was now generalised, and has affected the entire able-bodied portion of the population of both sexes from sixteen to sixty years old, the only exceptions being women with young children. It was applied in all the communes with the same rigour, and produced the most heart-rending scenes. Among the 600 persons carried off from Ham there were four patients from the hospital. At Noyon, a week after sending off the first batch, on February 17, the Germans selected fifty young girls who had been expelled from the region of St. Quentin and interned in the town. They were all sent to the North, in spite of the tears and entreaties of their parents, whose anguish was terrible.

Here, as in many other places, doctors, chemists and priests were among the first to be marked out for exile, and as nothing had been left in the pharmacy at the hospital, or in the operating-theatre, which had been disgracefully pillaged, the numerous invalids and sick persons brought from the neighbouring districts were unable, in spite of the efforts of charity, to obtain the care and succour of which they stood the more urgently in need because they were exhausted by cold, privation and sorrow. All these unfortunate creatures had arrived in a miserable state, and seven or eight of them died every day. They were persons who had been dragged from their beds, and who had not been given time to carry away anything. Among



them there were paralysed and dying people, several nonagenarians, and even one woman of 102 years old. Many had been carried off under the most atrocious circumstances. Mme. Deprez, the owner of the Château of Gibercourt, one of the victims of these pitiless orders, was suffering from a serious affection of the heart, and was obliged to keep her bed. An officer insisted upon her getting up and dressing in his presence, although she begged him to retire. She died twelve days later. Mme. Bègue, a woman of Flavy-le-Martel, who was also suffering from cardiac disease, had asked to be allowed to take with her her two young children, aged seven and four respectively, who were clinging to the wheels of the vehicle. This favour was refused, and the poor little creatures were left in the road. Another woman of the same commune was ill in bed when she was told that the Germans were about to carry off her husband. She got up at once, and, in spite of the opposition of an officer, succeeded in throwing herself into the prisoner's arms. He had to leave without embracing his child. The young woman was expelled from Noyon and brought to the hospital, where she abandoned herself to the most violent despair. On the day of her arrival she threw herself, together with her little girl, under the wheels of a motor car. Fortunately the nuns succeeded in rescuing her in time.

All these deportations afforded an army which has turned war into brigandage special facilities



for appropriating at its leisure all that had escaped its earlier depredations. "Our compatriots were scarcely four kilometres on their road," we were told by M. Dacheux, a municipal councillor who was acting as mayor at Guiscard, "when vans arrived at their doors to carry everything off." At Ham, the head of the *Kommandantur* took good care not to return a very valuable old table which he had borrowed from the Mairie, and General von Fleck removed all the furniture from M. Bernot's house, where he had been quartered. The operation was carried out so thoroughly that at the end of his stay the General, who had nothing left to sit on, was obliged to ask the municipality for a few chairs.

At Noyon, throughout the period of occupation, there was continual robbery. Many houses were sacked and the interiors defiled in a disgraceful manner. The bells of the cathedral and the pipes of the great organ were removed by order of the commanding officer. Safes belonging to private persons were broken open by revolver shots fired into the mechanism of the lock. On February 26 and 27 two soldiers, accompanied by two officers, came and opened the safes of the Société Générale by means of a blow-pipe, and carried off the contents. The same operation was carried out at Chéneau and Barbier's Bank and at Brière's Bank. The ledgers of each establishment were seized at the same time as the valuables. When M. Brière

expressed astonishment that even his archives should be taken from him, and pointed out that they could be of no use to anyone but himself, the officer whom he had addressed, and who gave himself out to be the emissary of the Berlin Treasury, merely replied : " My orders were to empty the safes, and I am emptying them."

At Sempigny, one of the few places where the houses are still standing, it is possible to form some idea of the scenes of plunder which occurred everywhere. From March 1, the date on which such of the able-bodied inhabitants as still remained were expelled, until the departure of the invading troops, this unhappy village was incessantly pillaged. It looks as if a horde of violent maniacs had passed through it, and in truth the Germans displayed a sort of frenzy in destroying everything they could not carry off, shattering beds and wardrobes with pick-axes or mallets, pulverising crockery and mirrors, breaking up agricultural implements and gardening tools, scattering corn and seed, stealing all the furniture of the High Altar in the Church, defiling drawers and cupboards with filth, and leaving excrements even in the kitchen utensils. Most of these exploits were performed by the 338th Infantry Regiment.

One asks oneself with stupefaction how the army of a nation which claims to be civilised could have been guilty of such deeds ; but it is still more astounding to find that its soldiers even violated the resting-places of the dead. In the cemetery of

Carlepont, the door of the chapel over the vault of the Swiss family Graffenried-Villars was carried off. Nothing but the copper fittings were left. A stone of the vault was prized up, and bones are visible through the aperture. The tomb of the Caillé family was also desecrated. The stone which covered it is broken, and human remains are exposed. At Candor, two witnesses surprised some Germans in the act of breaking open the tombs of the Trefcon and Censier families, and examining the interior of the Mazier vault, the lid of which they had worked off. The church to which the cemetery belongs had been shamefully pillaged; the silver figures of Christ on the Crucifixes had been torn off, and Mme. Collery herself removed the ornaments with which the soldiers had derisively decked the statue of a saint. At Roiglise there is a gaping hole in the pavement of the Derreulx Chapel which exposes the compartments of the vault. A coffin can be seen in one and some bones in another. All this damage is undoubtedly due to criminal enterprises, for there is no trace of bombardment either in or about the tombs.

After they had been pillaged, houses, châteaux and farms were destroyed by means of explosives, or were set on fire or demolished with pick-axes. At Margny-aux-Cerises, the operation was performed with the help of a powerful battering-ram. Annois, Flavy-le-Martel, Jussy, Frières-Faillouel and Villequier-Aumont no longer exist. Chauny, a manufacturing town of nearly 11,000 inhabitants,

is nothing but a heap of ruins, save for the suburb of Le Brouage.

After the expulsion of the able-bodied inhabitants, the rest of the population, consisting of 1,990 persons, were herded into this suburb together with about 3,000 men and women from the thirteen communes of the district, on February 23, 1917. On March 3 an order was issued from the *Kommandantur* ordering all these people to assemble the next day at 6 o'clock in the morning in one of the streets. Sick and infirm persons were not exempted, and some of them had to be carried to the place of assembly, which was over a kilometre long. There was a general call over and then an inspection, which lasted not less than six hours, and during which an officer selected three more men, thirty-one women, and a boy of thirteen for deportation to the North. The cold was intense, and on the following day twenty-seven persons died.

As soon as the citizens of Chauny were interned at Le Brouage, the Germans gave themselves up to unbridled pillage in the town, carrying off furniture, ripping open strong boxes, and sacking churches; and for a fortnight they proceeded to destroy the houses methodically by mines and incendiarism. For the past two months they had made notes of the dimensions of all the cellars, and so knew exactly what quantities of explosives were necessary for the execution of their infamous task.

Nothing is left of the Church of St. Martin but some portions of the wall. In Notre Dame, only a part of which was injured by explosion, the three alms-boxes are broken, and the marks of the instruments used to force them are very noticeable. The locks of the cupboards set in the panelling of the transept are forced. In the sacristy the chaos is indescribable; the presses are smashed, the drawers pulled out, and polluted sacerdotal ornaments are strewn on the ground.

On the 20th the enemy, having effected his retreat, began to bombard Le Brouage with batteries placed on the heights of Rouy. The bombardment continued for two and a half days, and was directed more especially against the Institute of St. Charles, which the Germans themselves had allotted as an asylum for the sick and aged, and on the roof of which they had painted enormous red crosses. Several persons were killed and others were wounded more or less seriously.

Even in the towns and villages they have not completely razed to the ground, the Germans made frantic efforts to destroy the factories and ruin agriculture. At Roye, for instance, where the fighting had caused no irreparable damage, they burned the sugar-refineries and took systematic steps to ruin all the industries, first by seizing all bronze, zinc, lead, copper and tin, and then by carrying off all the pieces of mechanism of any value, and smashing all the castings. At Ham, again, where they blew up the bell tower and

the château, they also blew up the two sugar-refineries of Messrs. Bocquet and Bernot, the Sebastopol distillery, M. Dive's oil-refinery and M. Serré's brewery. They acted in the same manner in many other places, notably at Flavy-le-Martel and at Ourscamp, which are models of devastation. Nearly everywhere the fruit trees in the open country and in gardens have been cut down, savagely hacked about, or barked in such a way as to kill them. Long rows of great poplar-trees, sawn through at the base, strew the fields adjoining the roads. The approaches to the villages are blocked by agricultural implements irretrievably damaged. Near what was once the railway station of Flavy-le-Martel we saw a vast orchard entirely devastated, and made a dumping ground for a large number of ploughs, harrows, mowing and reaping machines, mechanical rakes and sowers which have been wrecked, the damage being of such a kind that they are beyond repair. Here and there a certain number of these machines had been piled on bon-fires. The iron wheels were sprung, the mechanism smashed, and the wooden parts charred by the flames.

One has only to look at all these ruins to recognise that they were not heaped one upon another merely for military reasons, and that the desire to injure was the essential motive. A German army doctor, Professor Benneke, said one day to Sister St. Romuald, the Sister Superior of the hospital at Noyon : " You would not accept peace,



so now we have orders to make war on civilians " ; and at Guiscard a non-commissioned officer, who seemed intelligent and well educated, expressed himself as follows : " As Germany's peace-offers have been rejected, the war is about to enter on a new phase. Henceforth we shall respect nothing."

Such words reveal a very poor psychology. Nowhere, indeed, among those who have undergone such cruel trials, have we noted any indication of lassitude or discouragement ; we have met with no sentiment but that of patriotic enthusiasm and a fierce determination to obtain by victory the reparation for this multitude of crimes.

Pray accept, M. le Président du Conseil, the assurance of our respectful devotion.

G. PAYELLE, *President.*

ARMAND MOLLARD.

G. MARINGER.

PAILLOT, *Secretary.*

*Paris, April 12th, 1917.*





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